

Raising a Complaint with a Veterinary Practice



If you are unhappy with the service you have received or the care provided to your pet, you may want to raise a complaint with the practice. In this guide, the VCMS provides some useful information that may assist you and the practice to resolve your complaint.

STEP 1

Speak with the vet involved, or a member of the practice team that you trust

Feel free to ask questions and to share your concerns. In most situations your concerns can be addressed in a conversation with the practice. This prevents unnecessary worry for you and enables issues to be dealt with before a concern becomes formal.

STEP 2

Raising a formal complaint

If your issues are not resolved with an informal conversation, then ask for a copy of the practice's complaint procedure. This will often ask for complaints to be put in writing.

If for any reason this is unavailable, we suggest you put your complaint in writing and send this by email or recorded delivery to the practice for the attention of the Practice Manager or Lead Veterinary Surgeon.

When writing your complaint, follow our guideline on how to best communicate your concern:

- ◇ Keep the complaint factual;
- ◇ Explain why you are dissatisfied;
- ◇ Be concise in terms of the event;
- ◇ Be clear about what you would like the practice to do;
- ◇ Set out your expectations for a timescale.

Keep a copy of your complaint.

It is important to give the practice time to consider your complaint properly. They may need to speak to members of the veterinary team who work on different or part-time shift patterns.

We would suggest practices acknowledge a complaint with seven days, and within that acknowledgement give a timescale for their full response.

A reasonable period of time for a response will vary depending on the nature and complexity of the complaint. In some cases, it will be reasonable for the practice to respond fully within two to three weeks. In others, it may take longer. As a guide, complaints handling practice suggests a full response should be given within 56 days, unless there is a good reason why this is not possible. It is important to note that if your pet requires urgent veterinary care during the time you are waiting for a response, you should still seek this from the practice, or if you feel unable to return, attend another practice.

While you may be anxious or frustrated, allow the practice the time to look into your complaint properly. By working together, you are more likely to find a way of resolving your complaint. Try to avoid social media posts and online reviews at this time. Give the practice a chance to deal with any miscommunication or concerns privately.

If you or the practice have set out a timescale for responding, and this has passed, then contact the practice again - in writing - and highlight this and ask for confirmation of when the response will be finalised.

Ideally, a practice will contact you if their review is delayed, but this may not always be possible.

STEP 3

When you receive the response to your complaint:

- ◇ Take time to reflect and consider the response;
- ◇ The practice may set out, in some detail, further clinical or veterinary information. If you would like further information or clarification, contact the practice and ask for further explanation. Veterinary care, much like human healthcare, involves judgement. Vets may have different approaches or form different opinions. Conditions also develop and change which will alter veterinary opinion and make diagnosis easier or harder. If you are concerned, speak with your vet to understand and get a further explanation;
- ◇ If another vet or practice has given information which has informed your complaint, be prepared to share this with the initial practice so any areas of disagreement can be explored;
- ◇ If you remain unhappy, then contact the VCMS for mediation.

Visit the VCMS website for FAQs and guidance.

This guide is prepared for helpful information. It is not a formal policy or part of any code or regulation against which practices' own complaints handling should be judged.